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DE RUEHRA #0245/01 1261023
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 061023Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY RIGA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5804

UNCLAS RIGA 000245

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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [OIIP](#)
SUBJECT: RIGA PROPOSES TV CO-OP "MANY CULTURES, ONE NATION"

11. Summary. Riga proposes a FY09 TV co-op program on racial, ethnic and cultural diversity in the United States. This project, aimed at covering similarities and differences of various minority groups in the United States, will help the embassy address the strategic goal of promoting tolerance in the society and is especially significant in Latvia's context, as Latvia itself is a multi-national country with various ethnic minorities, composing close to 40 percent of the population.

The documentary would show challenges of cultural differences and the importance of addressing them with respect. The programs creators also plan to translate this documentary into Russian-language and arrange broadcasts with Latvia's eastern neighbors, such as Ukraine, Georgia and perhaps CIS countries, it will also contribute to the embassy strategic goal of assisting Latvia to become a strong contributor to sharing its experience and values in the region.

The independent TV production company Hansa Media, which has extensive experience in producing news documentaries on various social subjects, as well as produces several weekly TV shows on Latvian National Television has developed the concept for this program. During a TV co-op project, the team plans to produce documentary "Many Cultures, One Nation" as well as series of features on the subject for their weekly prime time TV show. End summary.

12. Context. Latvia broke free from the Soviet rule 18 years ago and since then has slowly re-joined the family of democratic nations in the Western world. Even though great progress has been made in many areas, including social inclusion of various minority groups (about 40 percent of Latvian inhabitants represent various ethnic minorities, largest of them being Russian, Belarussian, Ukrainian and Polish), many people still have biased views about the different racial, ethnic and cultural groups. Instead of full integration of these groups into the Latvian society, the public debate is still focused around "us" and "them", especially in the political context, as large part of Latvia's inhabitants are hesitating to naturalize and become Latvian citizens. Both Latvian- and Russian-language media, especially in areas outside of Riga, oftentimes is not fair in portraying differences, thus not helping the process of social inclusion. Despite the efforts to promote tolerance, there are still incidents based on racial or ethnic grounds. Some believe that economic strains would make the situation even worse and in the case of poor economic conditions different ethnic groups would start blaming each other (this process already is taking place on the political level but not in everyday life). It would be beneficial to start a more rigorous debate on the positive aspects of what preserving and respecting different cultures could bring to various levels of the society. The situation in the United States after the last presidential election is believed to be the momentum in the area of social consolidation that has inspired many not only in the United States but all around the world therefore the success of the U.S. practice and experience would be a good argument for audiences in Latvia.

13. Product. Hansa Media proposes producing a short documentary highlighting the diverse cultures of The United States. They would explore how various racial, ethnic, cultural and social groups live and work together in a democracy. The producers have themselves identified at least two aspects that they would be interested in

reflecting in this documentary - life of Native Americans in South Dakota and everyday work in a multinational business in New York. Both of these stories have a Latvian angle - a possible focus for the Native American story would be a member of Nez Perce Tribe Jamie Pinkham, who is married to an American of Latvian descent Tija Karkls. Likewise the owner of the business that would be featured in the second story is Mara Urshel - a Latvian. The Latvian connections of these individuals in the documentary provide a nice "hook" for local audiences. The producers are also looking for Russian families from Latvia who live in the United States. They would also be interested in covering other aspects and is open to suggestions from U.S. producers as to what other stories, on the life of various minority groups in the United States, including Americans of African, Asian, Mexican, Middle Eastern descent, could be used as additional story lines in this documentary.

¶4. Impact. The crew plans to show the diversity of people living in the United States and the benefits and challenges of integrating into the larger U.S. society while continuing to practice their cultures. It would demonstrate that being different can oftentimes be an advantage in social and political life, in business and it contributes a great deal to the development of ideas in the society. Bringing various cultures and experiences together, better results can be achieved. In There are very few media products in Latvia, especially on television, that are addressed to both Latvian- and Russian-speakers of the country. In addition to discussing the benefits of diversity, this documentary would provide a platform to reach both audiences at the same time.

¶5. Crew. The film crew from Latvia would consist of one producer, one reporter and one cameraman, all employees of TV production company Hansa Media. All of them are experienced professionals in their area. Producer Ilmars Latkovskis and reporter Adriana Roze are well-known and respected personalities on television in Latvia. The company has an agreement with Latvian National Television on producing several weekly prime time programs, including a TV feature show "Viss notiek", where the crew plans to demonstrate several features filmed in connection with the documentary. The company also has produced several successful prime time documentaries for Latvian National Television and several private TV networks in Latvia in the past.

¶6. Placement. Once completed, the documentary would be aired on a prime time slot on Latvian National Television in Latvian language (estimated audience approx. 150 thousand). After the premier, it will be also translated into Russian and offered to a Russian language channel in Latvia (estimated audience approx. 100 thousand) in order to reach also national minority audiences. To ensure broader viewership and impact of the documentary the crew plans to make arrangements with their cooperation partners in Ukraine and Georgia, as well as in some CIS countries and offer the film for screening there (estimated audience approx. 300 - 700 thousand, depending on the countries and stations).

¶7. Contacts. Post POCs on this project are PAO Ryan Roberts (Robertsr@state.gov) and Media Specialist Kaspars Ruklis (Ruklisk@state.gov). Post looks forward to working with PA/OBS on this project. Regards from Riga.
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